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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000954

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)  
SUBJECT: (S) MALIAN OFFICIALS CONFIRM PRESENCE OF KIDNAPPED  
UN ENVOY IN NORTHERN MALI

REF: A. NIAMEY 01166  
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00888

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(S) Malian National Assembly Deputy Ibrahim ag Mohamed Assalah told the Embassy on December 21 that missing UN Envoy Robert Fowler and fellow Canadian diplomat Louis Guay, who disappeared in Niger on December 14 (Ref. A), were now in northern Mali. Assalah said AQIM leader Bel Louar (aka Moctar bel Moctar) was holding the two diplomats.

2.(S) A Tuareg from the town of Bourem in the region of Gao, Assalah was an integral part of Mali's behind the scenes strategy to secure the release of the two Austrian tourists captured by AQIM in February 2008 and released in northern Mali at the end of October (Ref. B). He returned a few days ago from a trip to Tripoli to meet with Libyan leader Qadhafi to discuss, among other issues, Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga (septel). Assalah told the Embassy he received a call from the Malian presidency on Saturday, December 20, asking if he could confirm a report that the two Canadian diplomats were on Malian soil in the hands of AQIM. Assalah subsequently contacted an individual he described as a member of AQIM to confirm the Canadians' whereabouts. He relayed this information to the Presidency - and perhaps President Amadou Toumani Toure directly - mid-morning on Sunday, December 21.

3.(S) Assalah said the presidency had asked his advice regarding Mali's potential response to this new, and increasingly serious, hostage situation. Assalah, however, said Mali and Austria's failure to follow through on promises delivered during the Austrian hostage negotiations had left him feeling burned and had severely weakened his credibility with the nomadic populations he mobilized to pressure AQIM for the Austrians' release earlier this year.

4.(S) Assalah said he was particularly disappointed with the Austrians. He accused Austria of failing to deliver on promises for small development projects and wells for the nomadic populations Assalah used to help win the Austrian tourists' release. Assalah seemed particularly shocked by the Austrians' rapid departure from Mali. "They didn't even thank me," said Assalah of the Austrians. Assalah complained that Anton Prohaska, the Austrian Ambassador dispatched to Mali for the duration of the hostage crisis, disappeared without a word or a forwarding address just days after the Austrians were released, and that Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, who traveled to Bamako to welcome the released hostages and was apparently Assalah's only other contact with Austria, left the government in early December. "They just swept the whole thing under the rug," said Assalah of the Austrians. He also noted that the Austrian government had promised to fly him to Vienna for two weeks in order,

said Assalah, to give him some breathing space from those in northern Mali hassling Assalah for compensation following the hostages release.

5.(S) Assalah also faulted the Malian government. Upon his return to Bamako, Assalah said he asked the Malian government for help incorporating approximately a dozen northern youth he encountered during his information campaign throughout northern Mali into the Malian customs service. Assalah said senior Malian officials - presumably either Internal Security Minister Sadio Gassama or State Security Chief Mamy Coulibaly - had promised to find positions for the youth by mid-December. Last week, however, Assalah learned that the youth would have to wait until mid-January at the earliest. Assalah said several of the youth called him from northern Mali while he was in Tripoli last week. Assalah said he was forced to lie to the youth, telling them that the responsible official within the Malian government was sick and likely wouldn't be back in the office until January. After explaining to the Embassy the various pressures he was under as a result of his efforts to secure the release of the Austrian tourists, Assalah said he needed to drop out of sight for awhile, and once again lamented Austria's failure to deliver on the promised trip to Vienna.

6.(S) Complicating matters further, Assalah said he did not know whether AQIM would be susceptible to the same pressures he and others brought to bear on the terrorist group earlier this year via northern Mali nomadic communities since the Austrians were held by Abdul Hamid and the two Canadians are being held by Moctar bel Moctar.

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7.(S) Assalah said he had no information on the whereabouts of Ambassador Fowler and Guay's driver. Less than an hour after meeting with Assalah, however, the Embassy received a telephone call from Kader Bah, who is a close confidant of Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone and President Toure. Bah told the Embassy that Malian authorities now believed AQIM was holding Ambassador Fowler, Guay, and their driver in north-eastern Mali.  
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